

CONSERVATION GUIDELINES: OVER-THE-RHINE (SOUTH) HISTORIC DISTRICT

Development Principles and Conservation Guidelines

Rehabilitation

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These development principles and design guidelines provide a framework for the continuing revitalization of Over-the-Rhine. They were written specifically for Over-the-Rhine and address the community's unique historical, architectural, developmental, social and economic characteristics. The guidelines will assist property owners, architects and contractors who are considering work in neighborhood. These guidelines were approved and adopted by Cincinnati City Council in 1993 and are enforced only in the locally designated historic areas of Over-the-Rhine. Their concepts, however, are valid for the entire community. The Cincinnati Historic Conservation Office (HCO) encourages anyone contemplating work in Over-the-Rhine to consult with the HCO staff early in the planning process. Questions about the guidelines and consultation requests may be directed to the Historic Conservation Office, City Planning Department, Two Centennial Plaza, 805 Central Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.

DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

In June 1993 Cincinnati City Council adopted the following Development Principles to replace the Development Policies contained in the original Over-the-Rhine Urban Renewal Plan of 1985. These principles will guide continued development in the Over-the-Rhine Historic District.

An updated list of principles is essential as efforts become directed toward designing an aggressive program of redevelopment to serve all income levels and interests in Over-the-Rhine. The Principles are based on the policies contained in the original plan; however, they have been revised to reflect the current "climate" in both Over-the-Rhine and the city. They are essential to form a development strategy that will attract potential developers and provide assurance to funders that investing in Over-the-Rhine is good business.

A. General Development

1. Over-the-Rhine should continue to develop as a mixed-use area (residential, commercial and industrial) with clearly defined and protected residential "core" areas.
2. Establish clearly defined land-use objectives for each sub-neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine, and address the lack of transition between the various uses.
3. Demolition of buildings in Over-the-Rhine should be viewed as a last resort, unless part of a broader plan. Preservation and systematic renovation of all historically contributing buildings shall be a top priority.

4. A complete staff review and public examination of appropriate land uses and zoning regulations for all of Over-the-Rhine shall be undertaken using the 1985 Over-the-Rhine Urban Renewal Plan as a beginning point for discussion.

B. Residential

1. The development, preservation and maintenance of housing should be encouraged for persons of all income levels.
2. The involuntary displacement of residents, especially low-income and/or elderly residents, should be avoided. Proposed private and public developments should be evaluated on an on-going basis to determine the effect that such plans have on the displacement of current residents and businesses.
3. The rehabilitation of the existing housing stock should be the preferred housing development strategy.
4. New construction "in-fill" housing should be encouraged as a secondary means of providing necessary housing.
5. Incentives should be devised for owners of buildings with store-front businesses to utilize upper-story residential units for the provision of housing for persons of all income levels. Added incentives should be devised for development of housing for persons of low and moderate income.
6. Residential development projects that will be adjacent to incompatible land uses should include proposals for minimizing the adverse impact on such uses.

C. Commercial / Job Development

1. Policies should promote the development of varied commercial uses in order for Over-the-Rhine to maintain its mixed-use character.
2. Local and community-serving business uses should be encouraged in and near residential core areas and along Main Street and Vine Street north of Twelfth Street.
3. General commercial and office uses that serve a broader clientele should be located primarily along major thoroughfares in Over-the-Rhine. Existing sub-neighborhoods that are primarily residential in character should be preserved as such.
4. Findlay Market should be developed as a regional marketplace and tourist attraction while respecting the tradition of serving local residents.
5. Public policies, programs and incentives should be devised to promote job opportunities for low- and moderate-income Over-the-Rhine residents.
6. A plan should be developed to promote local businesses along Liberty Street. Measures should be taken to discourage the use of Liberty Street as a throughway connector between I-71 and I-75.

D. Traffic and Circulation

1. Through traffic should be contained to the major arteries of Over-the-Rhine, thus reducing traffic flow in residential areas.

2. Traffic circulation should be improved to facilitate access to all areas of Over-the-Rhine.
3. Residential development projects should include a reasonable plan for off-street parking within or near the site.
4. Safe, off-street parking on centralized lots or parking structures is the preferred means of meeting the parking needs of residential and commercial areas.
5. Pedestrian circulation should link community open space and pedestrian areas.

E. Parks and Open Space

1. There should be a reasonable and adequate supply of open space, and park and recreation facilities in and around residential core areas.
2. Washington, Ziegler, Hanna and Baymiller Parks, and Findlay Playground should be developed to provide increased recreational outlets and accessibility.
3. Unused, vacant lots should continue to be cleared through private and public initiatives, and used for community gardens, parks or recreation.
4. Undeveloped hillsides, which form Over-the-Rhine's northern boundary, should be preserved as passive recreation areas or natural preserves to the maximum extent possible.
5. Landbanking by public entities, nonprofit organizations or foundations should be the preferred means of preserving hillside open space.

F. Industrial

1. Over-the-Rhine's two existing industrial areas should be developed for small or light manufacturing and warehousing. Any existing industries located outside of these two areas should be provided incentives to relocate to appropriate sites within one of the two areas.
2. Rehabilitation of vacant industrial building should be the preferred development strategy.

G. Cultural

1. The cultural center in the vicinity of Washington Park and Music Hall should be preserved and enhanced.

CONSERVATION GUIDELINES

REHABILITATION

1. **Materials:** Missing or deteriorated materials should be replaced with recycled or new materials that match the original as closely as possible with regard to the following: type, color, style, shape, and texture of material. The composition, type of joint, size of units, placement and detailing should be appropriate for the building. Imitation or synthetic materials such as aluminum or vinyl siding, imitation brick or stone or similar plastic materials are inappropriate.

2. **Door and Window Openings:** Among the most important features of any building are its openings--its windows and doors. The size and location of openings are an essential part of the overall design and an important element in the building's architecture. Don't alter or fill-in original openings.

3. **Door and Window Sash:** Repair original doors and window sashes rather than replace whenever possible. If replacement is necessary, the new door or window sash should match the original in material, size and style as closely as possible. Vinyl windows are not appropriate replacement sash, due to their bulk and lack of detailing.

4. **Ornamentation:** Significant architectural features such as window hoods, decorative piers, quoins, bay windows, door and window surrounds, porches, cast-iron storefronts and other ornamental elements should be preserved. These distinctive features help identify and distinguish the buildings in Over-the-Rhine. Don't remove or replace ornamentation with substitutes that are of an unlike material or of a different scale or design. Make replacement ornamentation match the character of the existing feature closely as possible with respect to type, color, style, shape and texture of material. [If elements are missing, the new features should be based on historic documentation.]

5. **Roofs:** Chimneys, dormers or towers and other architectural features that give the roofline of an existing building its identifying character should be preserved. Most of the buildings in Over-the-Rhine have flat or single-pitch roofs. The addition of vents, skylights, and roof top utilities should be inconspicuously placed or screened where necessary. Retain and repair the original roof materials such as slate, which is common on churches, institutional buildings and buildings with mansard roofs, and standing seam metal roofs, which are common on smaller buildings with gable roofs. Don't use wood shakes and plastic roofing products, which are inappropriate materials in Over-the-Rhine.

6. **Cleaning:** Clean exterior surfaces with the gentlest method possible. For masonry structures, begin with scraping by hand or scrubbing with a natural bristle brush and mild detergent. Some types of chemical cleaning can be used, but test patches should be carried out in inconspicuous areas first. Don't sandblast or use other abrasive cleaning methods that destroy the surface of brick and stone and shorten the life of the building. Don't use wire brushes, because they can also damage masonry surfaces.

7. **Repointing Masonry:** Repoint historic masonry with mortar that matches the existing in color, content and texture and with joints that match in type and thickness. The mortar joints in masonry construction deteriorate for a variety of reasons. Repointing these joints can significantly aid the rehabilitation of a structure. Generally, buildings built prior to 1900 used a lime-based mortar. A typical lime-based mortar has the following formula: 8 parts sand, 4 parts lime, and 1 part portland cement. This mortar is softer than the portland cement-based mortar of today. Hard modern mortar used on historic masonry causes bricks to crack or spall during the freeze-thaw cycle.

8. **Water-Repellent Coatings:** Don't use water-repellent coatings on historic masonry. Most historic structures have survived without the need of water-repellent coatings. Water-related damage on the interior of buildings is usually the result of a failing roof, deteriorated or faulty gutters and downspouts, deteriorated mortar, rising damp or condensation. Water-repellent coatings will not solve these problems and may make them worse.

9. **Painting:** Repaint buildings that were historically painted. Most buildings built before 1890 in Over-the-Rhine were originally painted. Paint is part of the aesthetic design of these

buildings and should be maintained. Paint also protects porous nineteenth century masonry and masks alterations and inappropriate repairs. Masonry that has not been painted in the past should not be painted. Because color can have a significant impact on the neighborhood, use paint colors that are appropriate to your building's age and style. Historically, most paint schemes were relatively simple. The Historic Conservation Office can provide owners with color combinations that are appropriate for a building's age and style.

10. Wood Siding: Retain and repair original wood siding. When replacement is necessary, the new wood should match the original in size, shape, profile and detail. All wood siding should be painted. Aluminum or vinyl siding is not appropriate for replacing or covering original wood siding. Artificial stone, asbestos, asphalt siding and other similar resurfacing materials are not acceptable.

11. Shutters and other outside attachments: Original shutters should be repaired and retained. Many buildings in Over-the-Rhine have or had wood shutters for the windows. Reintroducing missing shutters must be based on physical evidence and the shutters must fit the opening and be operable.

Exterior light fixtures should be appropriate to the style of the building. Colonial "coach" lights are not appropriate. [If there is no precedent for lights, use a simple contemporary fixture.]

12. Storefronts: Retain and repair the design and materials of storefronts in historic buildings. First-floor storefronts are common in Over-the-Rhine and are found in all types of architectural styles. Detailing and materials vary considerably. Each design should be considered individually and original materials should be retained. If the storefront has been altered or if none of the original materials remain, old photographs may indicate the original design. Original masonry storefront materials should be cleaned with the gentlest method possible (see section on cleaning). Cast-iron storefronts may be cleaned by abrasive methods including sandblasting. Adjacent materials must be protected and the pressure should be less than 100 p.s.i.

Don't reduce the size of storefront openings. Transparency and scale are very important to storefronts and their relationship to the remainder of the building as well as to the streetscape. Don't cover or remove significant elements such as piers, lintels, transoms, original doors or other similar details.

13. Signs: Signs should be designed for clarity, legibility and compatibility with the building or property on which they are located. Signs should be located above the storefront, on the storefront windows or on awnings and should not cover any architectural features. Signs should capitalize on the special character of the building and reflect the nature of the business. Small projecting signs such as symbol signs are appropriate. Billboards, standardized internally-illuminated signs and temporary illuminated signs are not permitted.

14. Awnings: The installation of fabric awnings on storefronts is encouraged. Awnings add color and variety to commercial buildings and highlight the businesses. Awnings should be installed so they do not cover or require the removal of any original architectural feature. Awnings of metal, plastic, vinyl (not vinyl coated fabric) or wood are inappropriate. Internally illuminated awnings are not acceptable.

NEW CONSTRUCTION

A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. Infill construction is allowed on vacant sites in Over-the-Rhine, because gaps due to demolition weaken the streetscape and the overall character of the district. New construction can improve both the physical quality and economic vitality of the neighborhood.
2. New construction should be well-designed but should not replicate the existing buildings. The exceptional quality of the existing buildings in the district provide an outstanding framework for new construction.
3. The Historic Conservation Board's review of new construction will focus on the design compatibility with the surrounding contributing structures. The appropriateness of design solutions will be based on balancing the programmatic needs of the applicant with how well the design relates to the neighboring buildings and to the intent of these guidelines. New design proposals should pay particular attention to composition, materials, openings, rhythm, scale, proportion and height.
4. The new construction guidelines for this district will be used to judge the compatibility of new work. They must be adapted for each project, its specific site and its programmatic needs.

B. Specific Guidelines

1. **Composition:** New buildings should respond to the traditional subdivisions found on historic property: a base, a middle and a top. Most buildings in Over-the-Rhine are built of brick with the principal facade parallel to the street it faces. The most important features of buildings in Over-the-Rhine are the arrangement of openings on the principal facade and an overall vertical emphasis of the whole design. Each building provides its own variations, but collectively they share many basic features.

Base: New buildings should have a well defined base. Within the district most buildings have a base that is distinguishable from the rest of the building. This is accomplished through a change of materials, a change of scale, and/or a lintel or other type of horizontal banding. In larger buildings the original base may include more than the first floor.

Middle: Details on new buildings should relate to the detailing of adjacent or nearby buildings. Buildings in the district often incorporate architectural details such as changes in plane or changes in materials on their upper floors. Decorative, horizontal bands indicating the floor lines, sill heights or lintel heights should not overpower the vertical emphasis of the design.

Top: New construction must employ a strong element that terminates the uppermost part of the building. Distinctive elements in the architecture of Over-the-Rhine are elaborate projecting cornices, decorative parapets and the expressive use of materials.

2. **Roofs:** Roofs for new construction should be similar to roofs of adjacent and nearby buildings of similar size and use. In the district, buildings of three or more stories generally have low-pitched shed roofs that are not visible above the principal facade. Smaller buildings in the district typically have simple gable roofs on which the gables are perpendicular to the principal facade. Institutional buildings in Over-the-Rhine have a variety of roof shapes,

including dormers, multiple gables, hip roofs and towers. Roofs in this district have little or no overhang.

3. Window Openings: Window openings are extremely important in this district. The openings of new buildings should be related to the size and placement of openings found on historic structures of similar use in the district. In residential buildings, window openings are typically found individually rather than in pairs or grouped. The openings are taller than they are wide (typically in a proportion of 2:1), window sash are set back from the wall surface, and openings have some form of definition, such as lintels, sills or decorative surrounds. Window openings, which are typically aligned vertically, usually occupy between 20% and 50% of the principal facade.

In commercial, industrial and institutional buildings, windows are often grouped within a single opening. These building types may also use a combination of window sash, including double-hung, awning and hopper.

If muntins are used in new window sash, they must provide true divided lights. Within the individual opening, window sash are usually divided into two or more lights. In all cases the glass must be clear; tinted or reflective glass is not acceptable.

4. Storefronts: New storefronts should relate to the characteristics of existing storefronts on historic buildings. Storefronts in the district are typically taller than individual upper floors; framed by piers and/or columns and have a lintel separating them from the upper floors; are divided into bays which increases their verticality and provides a pedestrian scale and proportion; and have large, fixed expanses of clear (not tinted or reflective) glass.

The storefront lintels are 12 to 18 feet above grade; the window sill height is between 18 inches and 3 feet above grade; and storefront windows are set back from the structural elements approximately 12 inches.

5. Setback: Setback is an important issue in a dense urban area such as Over-the-Rhine. The setback for new construction should be consistent with the buildings of similar use on adjacent and nearby sites. In Over-the-Rhine, most commercial buildings are built up to the property line. Some residential property, especially detached buildings, have shallow setbacks but retain an "edge" at the property line with a fence. Some larger institutional buildings such as schools, churches and public buildings are setback from the street to provide public space and to add to their monumentality. In most cases new construction on corner sites should be built up to the edge of both outside property lines.

6. Rhythm: New buildings should incorporate design features, such as window groupings, articulation of wall surfaces, and decorative elements such as columns or piers in an effort to maintain the rhythm that already exists in the district. New construction should avoid creating long unrelieved expanses of wall along the street by maintaining the rhythm of bays found on the district. Most buildings In Over-the-Rhine are relatively narrow, 25 to 50 feet in width. A building facade typically displays vertical subdivisions that establish a visual rhythm. In dense commercial areas such as Main Street and Vine Street, there are no setbacks, creating a solid wall along the street. This wall is articulated by the individual buildings, which in turn are divided by window groupings, changes in wall planes and decorative elements such as pilasters, columns or piers.

7. Emphasis: New residential and mixed-use construction should have a vertical emphasis, because in Over-the-Rhine buildings are taller than they are wide, window openings are tall

and narrow, and storefronts have slender columns, which emphasize verticality. Commercial and industrial buildings, which may have an overall horizontal emphasis, often incorporate vertical elements, such as pilasters or vertically oriented openings.

8. **Height:** The height of new construction should not vary more than one story from adjacent contributing buildings. Most buildings in Over-the-Rhine are between 2- and 5-stories.

9. **Materials:** New construction should use materials that are found in the historic buildings in Over-the-Rhine. Clearly the dominant material in Over-the-Rhine is brick, but other materials such as limestone, sandstone, cast-iron, slate, wood and sheet metal are important as well. Materials such as concrete block, stucco, synthetic stucco and plastic are not appropriate and should not be considered as exposed finish materials for new construction in this district.

ADDITIONS

A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. Additions are allowed and should follow new construction guidelines. They should appear contemporary but compatible in character with the original. They should be sympathetic but not imitative in design.
2. Additions should be designed to relate architecturally to adjacent buildings in general and to the building they are a part of in particular.
3. Additions should not overpower the original building. [They should be clearly secondary to the original structure.]
4. The appropriateness of design solutions will be based on balancing the program needs of the applicant with 1) how well the proposed design relates to the original building and neighboring buildings and 2) how closely the proposal meets the intent of these general guidelines and the specific guidelines for new construction.

SITE IMPROVEMENTS

A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. Site improvements, such as parking lots, parking pads, paving, fences, decks, street furniture and trees, should be in character with the contributing buildings in the district and should respond to the colors, textures, materials and scale found in the area of the improvement.
2. The design of any site improvement should be compatible with district buildings and not detract from the character of the district.
3. The design of site improvements should capitalize on the unique character of the area but should not incorporate elements from an earlier or different period. Site improvements should enhance the experience of pedestrians in the district.

B. Specific Guidelines

1. **Parking Lots:** Cars in parking lots should be screened from public view. Appropriate screening includes low masonry walls in conjunction with planting areas and landscaping, low masonry walls with wrought-iron fencing and planting areas with landscaping and wrought-iron fencing. Chain link fence along side walks is inappropriate.

Parking lots with a capacity of ten or more cars should contain trees within the lot as well as around the perimeter of the lot. Concrete curbs, not rolled asphalt bumpers, are appropriate edges for parking lots.

2. **Parking Pads:** Parking pads (parking for one or two cars) are permitted at the rear of the property, with access at alleys or existing curb cuts whenever possible. Parking pads in areas other than the rear yard shall be judged on a case-by-case basis and judged by their impact on the property and on the district.

3. **Fences and Walls:** Wrought-iron or cast-iron fences that are less than three feet in height are encouraged along the sidewalks of vacant lots or where buildings are setback from the sidewalk. Fencing may be set between wrought-iron and cast-iron posts, natural stone posts or pre-cast concrete posts. Fencing may also be set on a concrete curb or on top of a retaining wall. Plain board fences (vertical boards nailed side-by-side on horizontal stringers) or wire fences are appropriate at the rear of the property or along the side of the property. Wood fences should be painted or stained but not left to weather naturally. Chain link, stockade, shadow board, basket weave, lattice and other contemporary designs are not appropriate. Masonry privacy walls are not encouraged.

Retaining walls built along the front property line or along street frontage should be built of or faced with fieldstone or limestone. Retaining walls at other locations should be built of fieldstone, limestone, brick or specialized masonry block designed for retaining walls. Concrete block or exposed concrete should not be used as the finish material for any retaining wall.

4. **Decks:** Wood decks that are built on the ground should be stained or painted. Decks accessed above the first-floor are discouraged, as are rooftop decks that can be seen above the principal facade.

5. **Paving for sidewalks, patios and other similar areas:** Materials used for paving should have the appearance of individual units to give the surface scale. Appropriate materials include brick, stone, scored concrete and unit pavers. Concrete should be limited to sidewalks and should not be used in large slabs over big areas, such as driveways and parking lots.

6. **Street Furniture and Amenities:** Improvements to the right-of-way or in public areas should be simply designed and modest in size. Existing historic elements in the right-of-way such as steps, mounting blocks, fences, paving, natural stone curbs and splash blocks should be retained. Historic materials such as pavers, curbs or steps shall be returned to their same location, even if they are to be paved over, when they are removed to install or repair utilities such as water, sewer, electric, gas, cable, security or for any other purpose. Flower boxes, planters, urns and similar elements are encouraged but should be appropriate to the property where they are placed and with the district as a whole. The installation of these elements should not cover or require the alteration of any architectural details.

7. **Trees:** Street trees and trees on private property are encouraged. Don't cut down mature, healthy trees. [Location of the trees should be in keeping with the district's character. Consideration should be given to the type, shape and color of the trees and even more importantly to the characteristics of their root systems.]

DEMOLITION

Demolition of existing buildings shall be permitted only if one of the following conditions exist:

- a) Demolition has been ordered by the Director of Buildings & Inspections for the public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition which constitutes an emergency.
- b) The owner can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Historic Conservation Board that the structure cannot be reused nor can a reasonable economic return be gained from the use of all or part of the building proposed for demolition. The Historic Conservation Office will provide owners with a list of information that may be necessary to satisfy the Board that the building cannot be reused.
- c) The demolition request is for an incompatible building, an inappropriate addition or a non-significant portion of a contributing building and the demolition of said structure will not adversely affect the streetscape as determined by the Historic Conservation Board. A list of the non-contributing buildings is provided below.

NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

A. Intent and General Guidelines

A number of buildings in the district do not contribute to the historic character of the district. The Historic Conservation Board will review the proposed alteration or demolition of these buildings based on the guidelines in this section. These guidelines encourage changes in the district that will reinforce its historic and architectural character, but acknowledge that some buildings are of a different age or architectural period.

Buildings that do not contribute to the historic character of the district fall into two general categories:

1. **Newer buildings:** Most buildings that were built within the past fifty years do not fit the historic or architectural context of the neighborhood. Due to their more recent date of construction, these buildings did not contribute to the development of Over-the-Rhine as an urban, nineteenth-century neighborhood. The majority of these newer buildings differ architecturally from the district's historic buildings, especially in scale, building materials, and detailing.
2. **Significantly altered buildings:** Some older buildings have lost the integrity of their original design due to substantial, incompatible exterior alterations. Buildings in this category not only have been stripped of architectural details, but have been altered completely in their appearance. The basic design, scale and rhythm of these buildings no longer relate to the historic buildings of the district.

B. Specific Guidelines

1. **Rehabilitation:** The rehabilitation of non-contributing buildings should comply with the guidelines for rehabilitation, as outlined in the "Rehabilitation" section of this document. These rehabilitation guidelines provide a framework for maintaining a building's basic architectural character; they do not suggest that a building be redesigned or altered to appear older than it is. Alterations to a newer building should be compatible with the original architectural character of that structure or should help the building to relate better architecturally to the surrounding historic district. The rehabilitation of an older, altered

structure should restore elements of the building's historic character, whenever possible, based on remaining physical evidence, historic documentation, or similar buildings nearby. Alterations to non-contributing buildings should not create a false sense of history. In many cases it is preferable to rehabilitate and reuse a non-contributing building than to have a vacant parcel or parking lot.

2. **Additions:** Additions to non-contributing buildings should comply with the guidelines outlined in the "Additions" section of this document. Additions should be designed to relate architecturally to adjacent buildings and to the building of which they are a part. Additions should not overpower the original building.

3. **Demolition:** Non-contributing buildings may be demolished if the demolition will not adversely affect the character of the district. The Historic Conservation Board's review of an application to demolish a non-contributing building will include an evaluation of plans for the redevelopment of the cleared site, based on the "New Construction" and "Site Improvements" sections of this document.